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# AFFECTING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN STUDENT SERVICES

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This article presents a decision-making matrix model for Student Services' organizations. The model is a result of three years of one such Student Services organization's attempt to achieve greater effectiveness, i.e., the degree to which the organization realizes its goals. The key concept in the model is the effective utilization of human and fiscal resources by focusing in on the function to be accomplished.

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AFFECTING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN STUDENT SERVICES

Across the nation there is a growing concern regarding the impact and effectiveness of colleges and universities. As the limited resources available to higher education become more contingent on "accountability" the concern for effectiveness must be shared by everyone in the academic community. A review of the literature demonstrates an additional need for more diversity in higher education programs, more options, and less homogeneity (Newman, 1971; Martin, 1969; Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1971). These two needs present the greatest challenge and opportunity to Student Services professionals. For higher education to be both available and meaningful, changes are required not only in academic programs and practices but Student Services programs as well. Planned change must be a result of all facets of the institution working together. Student Services professionals have a great deal of expertise to offer, working with others in the university community, in achieving personalization of the educational process. Student Services' organizations, however, must become more effective organizations to make the needed contributions.

Higher education is confronted with the same pressures as other complex organizations: to clarify organizational goals; control performance; and combat alienation. Bennis (1969) discusses the problems that confront all organizations: how to integrate individual needs and organizational goals; social influence, which is essentially the problem of power and how it is distributed; how to manage and resolve conflicts; chronic change necessitating adaptation; the degree to which the organization is clear about and committed to its goals; and revitalization or conscious attention to the organization's own evolution. Student Services organizations have traditionally been

careless about their delivery systems and vague about their goals. As in all of higher education, the answer to all problems has been to add more staff. A thesis of the present article is that a large percentage of staff potential is being lost to greater organizational effectiveness through inappropriate use of resources.

Effectivess is another way of looking at change and how to affect change in the organization. Change has become the recognized pivotal factor operating in all complex organizations. Drucker (1969) asks the question: "If you could change your institution or your own organization--what would you change?" According to Drucker, regardless of the kind of organization, people always give very self-serving, restricted answers to what change should be. Student Services organizations must develop effectiveness so that both staff and organization are neither victims nor resistors of change, but rather facilitators of planned change. What is proposed in this article is the use of a flexible system or "matrix organization" (Bennis, 1965) to achieve organizational effectiveness in Student Services. In such a system people are viewed as resources to be utilized when their capabilities are needed to perform a task. According to Ikenberry and Friedman (1972), few institutions of higher education have experimented with task-oriented structures.

A restricted vision of change is very often the result of naive perceptions about organizations and a lack of goal clarity. The actual effectiveness of an organization is determined by the degree it realizes its goals. Where are the goals and objectives you wrote for the Dean or the central administration? Do the goals of your organization really serve as fundamentals of policy, general decision guides, planning principles, evaluation measures, or accountability standards? Various authors (Etzoni, 1964; Price, 1968; Churchman, 1968) have discussed the

relative difficulty of identifying the operative or real goals of an organization. Charles Perrow (1961) states that operative goals very often bear no necessary relation to official goals; the former may support, be irrelevant to, or actually subvert official goals. Berdie (1974) writes that Student Services organizations' goals and objectives must be perceived in terms of the student behaviors which are to be affected. The Student Service professional must specify what changes in student behavior are desired, and only then can programs, procedures, and resources be identified. One of the greatest obstacles to clarity of and committment to organizational goals is a general lack of understanding of communications and the role of perception in communications.

There is probably nothing more invalid than believing in "objective communications". A human being is a perceiving animal. In perceptual terms behavior is understood as a consequence of two kinds of perception: the perceptions one has about the world and those one has about oneself. People behave according to the choices they make among alternatives they see available to them. At any given time a person's behavior is the consequence of all the perceptions available to the person. Existing perceptions have a selecting, determining effect on further perceptions. Training in communications is most often in skill training even though the disparities usually occur in construing or selecting process. "Data" in communications is each person's interpretation of reality. Each person's perception determines what goes into the construing process to make up the communication. The message comes to the receiver as a "data base" and the same construing process begins again. Involved

in this selecting process are: how the information impacts on one's own anticipated goals; the relative value of one goal to another; the expectancy of one's impact on the final outcome, and how it is going to be perceived by people who are going to hear or see it. To further complicate communication, screening or filtering tends to occur as a function of perception. Bennis (1969) warns that if you are interested in change, don't write memos. Too often a person's response has nothing to do with the information but is based solely on the perception of the other person. Communications must be improved to provide constant, reliable feedback to the members of the organization.

Open communications are vital to any type of management style. The organizations where MBO has failed cite poor communications as the major reason for failure. The temporary systems suggested in this article require open communications and sharing the responsibility of being open and solving problems. The first step is to bring the individuals in the organization together to develop interpersonal skills so they can function better as a team. Implicit in the word team is the understanding that the group has some job to do, some common function to perform. Although the emphasis is on changing the organization, not the individual, the development of interpersonal skills is important. Argyris (1962) writes that organizational effectiveness is a function of the interpersonal relationship of its members. In the present model we have found it necessary to assist staff members to: improve interpersonal skills; learn to make more extensive use of feedback to identify problems; and to anticipate needed programs and services.

An effective organization must value problem solving and reward staff members for identifying and defining problems. Members of the organization must understand and agree on what they are trying to accomplish so that all available resources can be used to that end. If people truly value problem solving they will continuously learn from their experience. Frequently staff must re-examine problem solving methods and relate them to planning, operations and research. Too often solutions are applied without really defining the problem. All staff members must be made aware of what is happening in both the external and internal environment. In the process of defining the problem the resources, objectives, constraints, and alternatives are identified. Rather than being sidetracked by constraints within or outside of the organization, one examines what units are affected and how ready and capable they are to make change. The following description of how one Student Services organization developed a matrix model is a product of three years effort. As a staff we first examined the difference between what was happening and what should be happening in the organization, and the character of the communication process (the adequacy and accuracy). Following six months of self study and team building, a leveling workshop was held consisting of the Directors of the units (Student Union, Food Service, Married Student Housing and Maintenance, Single Student Housing, Physical Recreation-Intramural Center, University Hospital and Clinic, Student Affairs, and the Vice President and his staff). We then began to examine, as a team, the kind of organization that would allow us to be more effective.

Given the fact that we were a part of a much larger and more complex organization called the university, and that Student Services' goal is one

of development, it became apparent that the existing organizational and operational model would not allow us to be more effective. Bureaucracy as a system cannot support the goal of human development. Bennis and Slater (1968) identify four major conditions that make bureaucracy obsolete as an effective twentieth century organization: rapid and unexpected change, growth in the size of organizations, increased diversity, and change in managerial behavior. In addition, the rewards inherent in human development goals are counter to the rewards built into the bureaucratic system. Given our goal, the system should reward taking reasoned positions, commitment, risk taking and action in support of legitimate issues in contrast to what appears generally to be an unwillingness on the part of some to risk being on the "wrong" side of an issue in the face of administrative censure or other coercive power within the institutional bureaucracy. An organization concerned with human development must emphasize creativity, flexibility and innovativeness, egalitarian rather than authoritarian concepts; and planned, often rapid, if not revolutionary change rather than evolutionary. The organization must be built on a symbiotic relationship between individual and group need satisfaction, and individual and organizational goal attainment. What kind of an organization, then, could we invent? What organization would be futuristic enough in concept and function to serve the interests of changing needs within a rapidly shifting world scene?

## ORGANIZATIONAL COMPONENTS

The organization that would allow us greater utilization of resources must have: shared power and decision making; flexibility; open communications; shared goal and priority setting. An examination of each of these components

finally led to a delivery system that focused on the function to be accomplished rather than a person or position.

Shared power and decision making in an organization would allow resources to be utilized in the most effective way possible in making decisions. Evidence suggests that the most effective decisions are made by those at, or close to, the source of relevant data needed for the decision. Decision-making authority as well as the responsibility for the decisions, for most operational matters should therefore be distributed to those closest to the data sources. This requires that each individual within the organization must know their level of decision making, i.e., the basic parameters within which they are to operate. There is, however, in all organizations one person who must assume the ultimate responsibility for all decisions. There should be no misunderstanding of the difference between <u>making</u> a decision and <u>contributing</u> to the making of a decision. Such shared decision making requires that influence should stem from competence and knowledge rather than the vagaries of personal whims or perogatives of power. In a modern organization no single human being is so omniscient as to possess the knowledge and professional competence needed to make all decisions. What must be understood is what each other's responsibilities are in the decision making process. In this manner resources can be utilized in the most effective way possible in making decisions.

The organization we wanted to design must have flexibility. To keep ahead, or at least abreast of the demands of accelerating change, the organization must have the built-in ability to adapt and adjust quickly and openly to meet changing situational demands or data modifications.

All too often we are part of the complaint that institutions are far too sluggish in their response and are apparently incapable of making timely adjustments. Such a model requires the opportunity for continuous reorganization on a need basis to place people and physical resources in ways to carry out the objectives most effectively. This would be in marked contrast to the bureaucratic model which assigns priorities in such a manner as to disturb the existing structure as little as possible. Such a flexible, free-wheeling system admittedly has the greatest appeal to competent professionals who are secure in their relationships, and confident of also being able to meet their personal needs in temporary, need-flutuating, dynamic systems.

As stated above, open communications are a must in any organization. It is essential that the organization permit maxium communication between and among individuals and groups as well as other elements of the academic community. An open system is possible only if a high degree of acceptance and trust exists among group members and among groups within the system. A framework allowing free flow of data leads to realistic goal setting and sound decision making based on adequate information.

This new organization would also provide the opportunity for individual and organizational symbiosis. Most writers agree that an organization member is more likely to experience personal and professional growth if they share in the development of organizational goals and consequently becomes committed to their achievement. Each one of us tends to support what we help to create. At the same time, one should be able to work toward the attainment of personal and professional goals that coalesce with those of the organization through the process of the developmental

contract. Each individual within the organization must share in the development of a plan that will allow them to grow and develop as a person and professional while at the same time maximizing the use of their talents and energy in furthering the goals of the organization. Thus the relationship of the individual to the organization must be one of working together in a mutually beneficial way - a "developmental contract" between the individual and their organization.

Quite simply the developmental contract consists of the establishment of organizational goals and the setting of priorities; modification of the organization as required for the task, and the allocation of resources in accordance with goals and priorities. Obviously to be a developmental contractual agreement, the people affected must be involved appropriately in the establishment of the goals of that organization. Responsible participation in the goal-setting process should bring about a higher level of commitment. It is as imperative to prioritize those goals as it is to set them. As in the reassessment of the goals, those most affected should participate in establishing action priorities through evaluation of current efforts and new data emanating from within the system. It must be understood, however, that participation does not always mean that is the final decision that will be made. The organization must have the designed flexibility permitting its own modification as required for the task. This is necessary in attitude as well as structurally and operationally, i.e., individuals within the organization must not get caught up in the "means" of their office rather than the "meaning". Flexibility permits movement in and out of the structure as needed. The developmental contract can then achieve the effective utilization of resources in accordance with the prioritized goals and objectives of the organization.

PLANNING AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Most of us realize that planning is a never ending process. We realize that both internal and external forces are in constant motion that create or cause new needs to come about. It is therefore critical that the major purpose or goal of our organization is kept clearly in mind. Our objectives both short and long range, must be in keeping with our goals. These objectives should be specific in nature and have a time frame for completion. Our objectives should be prioritized in terms of meeting our goals as well as providing the basis for the allocation of our resources, both human and physical. Woven through all of this fabric must be a process of evaluation that assists us in determining whether or not specific programs are meeting specified needs and objectives, and in the establishment of priorities.

Priorities must be established on the basis of needs, not on the basis of how much money we have to spend. In all probability our needs list will far exceed available dollars. That should not mean that we lose sight of our priorities. Our limited funds must be put to use where they will be most effective on the basis of the established priorities. Once the priorities are determined, we can then see how far down the list the dollars will go. At this point we must ask the following questions:

1. Are there programs or services for which the unit could charge, or increase the charge, without losing quality and/or participation?
2. Can costs be shared with other units?
3. Can resources be reallocated to accomplish programs and services more effectively?
4. Can programs or services be cut or reduced, i.e., are there operational costs that can be cut or reduced in order to apply

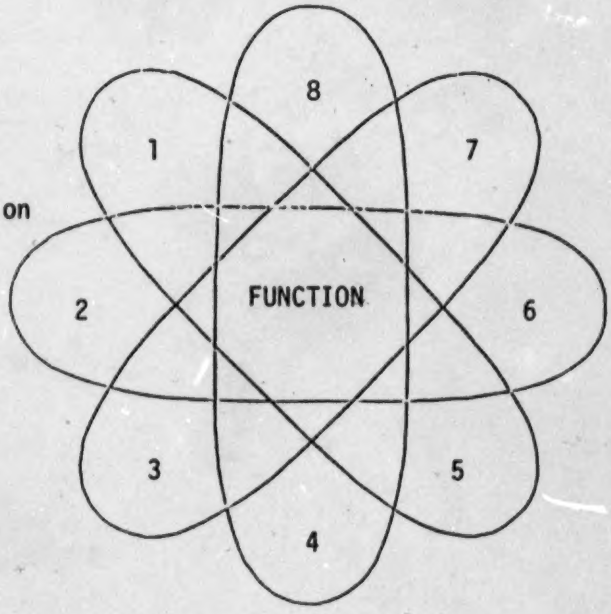
those dollars to higher priorities?

5. Can there be an increase in funding such as a general fee increase?

Throughout this entire process: the establishment of goals and objectives; evaluation, and priority setting, it cannot be overemphasized that there must be the fullest participation possible by those to be affected. Not only will the commitment be greater, the ultimate decision by the responsible administrator should be better through a more effective utilization of resources. In order to bring about organizational change, the people involved must be ready for that change. Also, the people affected must be involved in determining the type of organization they wish to have. Given the elements listed that would be a part of the organization we desired to established, we determined that the existing operational model would not work. That is, the typical organizational model with its pyramid of boxes and lines was also the operational model which acted as a barrier to achieving shared decision making, flexibility, open communication, and individual and organizational symbiosis.

What was needed was a flexible model that focused on function both in concept and design.

1. External Environment
2. Research and Evaluation
3. Policies
4. Programs




5. Internal Environment
6. Services
7. Administration
8. Fiscal

This model permits movement in and out of the structure as the expertise of the given resource unit is required. The different parts can thus take on a different value or weight as the function demands.

The most important aspect of the model is that it focuses on the function. Whether it is in the form of a problem, a program, setting priorities, a policy or a service, it is the function upon which the resources are brought to bear, not the administrative unit. The administrative unit becomes another resource and is therefore utilized as required to meet the demand even to the point of fulfilling its ultimate responsibility in making the decision. The mind-set, then becomes one of defining the nature of the function, determining the resources required, and bringing those resources to bear on the function. This means the utilization of work teams, task forces, and other common goal interest groups that are formed to do the job, evaluate it, dissolve or reconstitute in a modified form depending on the situational demands.

Perhaps all Bennis is really trying to say to us is that we have tried to shape our operational model from another's mold - - the wrong mold, rather than design one to meet our own organizational needs. We have assumed that what has worked in the past, or what has worked in industry, or what has worked (?) in government is an operationally sound model for institutions such as ours to attempt to squeeze ourselves into. We have cloaked ourselves in the trappings of the corporate model and then attempted to convince everyone that, as educational institutions, we are very much different than corporations and government bureaucracies. We therefore should not and cannot be evaluated, or even account for ourselves, on the same basis. We fog our public's perceptions and expect them to perceive us clearly.

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